'The Isthmus Playhouse' wins the prize

By ROB FIXMER
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When the Madison Civic Center's 400-seat experimental thrust theater opens its doors in 1980, one man in the audience will have the distinction of having named it "The Isthmus Playhouse."

In a brief ceremony this morning, Russell Frank, 32, of 5414 Greening Lane, was declared the winner of a county-wide contest to name the smaller of the Civic Center's two auditoriums. The larger, 2,400-seat facility (formerly the Capitol Theatre) was renamed The Oscar Mayer Theater last year.

The Isthmus Playhouse, now nearing completion, will be of wholly new construction with state-of-the-art lighting and sound equipment. A large thrust stage will be surrounded on three sides by bench style, carpet covered seats. The balcony level will have chair seating for another 100 people.

It will serve as the home of a number of local performing arts organizations, including Madison Civic Repertory Theater and Kanopy Dance Theater.

For coming up with the winning name, Frank received two orchestra tickets for opening night at the Civic Center, plus tickets for five other house presentations during the 1980 Gala Opening Festival.

Frank, manager of Hamilton Supply Company, a liquor and wine wholesaler, is a life-long resident of Madison. "The Isthmus Playhouse" was his only entry in the contest, he told The Capital Times.

"One night my brother was visiting, and he and my wife and I just sat around thinking up names for it," he said. **"We kind of felt that name would be easily recognizable. The word 'isthmus' is readilly identifiable with Madison by anyone who knows the city. It has a little bit of symbolism."**

According to Civic Center commission Chairman John Oros, Frank's entry was one of 250. Oros added that more than a dozen had suggested the facility be named after Mayor Paul Soglin. Oros called Soglin a catalyst and constant source of energy to the Civic Center project, but said rather than selecting a controversial name the committee felt that a name that would encompass the entire community would be appropriate.

Apparently the judges agreed. Civic Center Commission Chairman John Oros commented that Frank's name had been one of "a lot of good entries." He did not offer any examples of losing names, but one Civic Center staff member said that there had been "numerous" suggestions to name the facility The Paul R. Soglin Theater.

However, according to the staffer, the judges had steered away from naming the theater after a local personality because "they wanted it to represent a broad cross-section of the community."

In addition to receiving tickets for the opening night performance by Martina Arroyo and the Madison Symphony Orchestra on Feb 23, 1980, Frank will be the city's guest for: the Ben Sidran Jazz Festival, Feb. 14; an appearance by the Conjunto Folklorico Nacional de Cuba, March 1; a concert by the Milwaukee Symphony with Garrick Ohlsson, March 5; the San Francisco Ballet, March 14; and Fred Waring and the Young Pennsylvanians, March 18.

But none of those performances will introduce Frank to the theater he named; each is being produced in the Oscar Mayer Auditorium.

Television coverage by all three Madison stations and radio coverage by WISM, WIBA and WTSO.

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